

I would like to relay comments in regards to a petition filed by certain inmates and their families related to Inmate Calling Services (ICS). This petition is referred to as the *Wright Petition and Inmate Payphone Rulemaking*, CC Docket 96-128. I realize that this petition is directed at privately administered prisons, but I am concerned that any such ruling in this area could be carried over to state operated prisons at a future date.

In Massachusetts, inmate telephone services are obtained via a public bidding process (RFP). We have had contracts in place for inmate calling services since the early 1990's. Our inmate calling system contains numerous security features, including call recording, restrictions on call forwarding, PIN access and restrictions on the number of individuals an inmate has the ability to call. These security features were implemented as a means to eliminate or reduce the amount of fraud, crime, and threatening telephone calls, which were originating from our correctional institutions. The inmate calling system in place today has dramatically reduced the number of these types of calls being placed from our prisons. Accordingly, there is cost associated in installing these security phone systems and this is the primary reason why rates charged for calls originating from a prison cannot be compared to "normal" telephone rates charged on the outside world.

In Massachusetts, we are very aware of the impact the collect calls from prisons have on families and friends of those serving time. We have taken great effort to try to maintain inmate calling rates that, we feel, are among the lowest in the nation. For instance, our surcharge for an intraLATA call is 86 cents. In awarding our existing contract for inmate calling services, the vendor that submitted the proposal as to specifications and offering the lowest calling rates was selected. The per minute charges are a tariffed rate. As long as the rates charged are regulated and reasonable, it is our opinion that we should be able to charge for these services. Our commission structure is 42% and these commissions are returned, as revenue, to the General Fund of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. They are not utilized as a "general slush fund" for the DOC.

The inmate calling system in place here has the capability to be used both as a collect call or debit call system. All of our calls, except international calls, are placed as collect calls. We would very much like to migrate to an inmate calling system in which the inmate would have the choice when placing a call to make either a collect or debit call. At this time, we are unable to do this. Debit calling is more staff intensive on our resources. In these times of budget constraints and shrinking support staff, the resources just are not available to assume this extra work.

The security considerations involved with the operation of inmate telephone systems are imperative to and unique in a correctional setting. We do not want to lose our ability to make decisions regarding how inmate telephone systems will operate in our prisons. We see this petition as a potential threat to our ability to manage our prisons and provide public safety in the Commonwealth. We ask that the Commission give due consideration to the unique aspects of running a correctional institution and according continue to allow administrators to have the ability to determine how inmate calling services should be provided.